

## Communicating with young people

Communication can be critical in maintaining health and safety. This can be in the form of safety information, communications between team members or between different teams during operations or maintenance work, and emergencies.

There are lots of ways to communicate with workers; however, there may be some ways that are more effective in getting your message across in the work place where there are younger people.

You may want to consider the following points:

- **Messaging.**

Health and safety messages should be framed in the right way. Young people need to understand what is expected of them but the messages should be kept short, simple and easy to remember. Make it personal so that they understand the benefits for them and not just the organisation

- **Delivery.**

Young people who are less used to work may have a shorter attention span, so communications should be punchy and brief. Be as clear and precise as possible with instructions. Visual messages may be more effective. Don't rely on one form of communication but instead reinforce messages with other forms of communication. Photographs of correct and incorrect procedures can aid understanding. Demonstrate how to perform a task safely, instead of telling them

- **Understanding.**

Don't overload messages with technical jargon which young people, new to the job, might struggle to

understand. Regularly check that they understand what they are being asked to do (even if they say yes). Some young people may have difficulty reading or writing. They may need to be shown how to perform the same task several times. Be aware of cultural and language barriers. Those without English as a first language may require additional instruction so double check their understanding

- **Create opportunities for communication.**

Methods such as discussion groups, online forums, toolbox talks, mentoring schemes, suggestion schemes and other tools can be useful for raising awareness

- **Provide feedback.**

Give positive and constructive feedback, praise and encouragement. Ensure that you are always approachable and receptive

- **Style.**

Young people communicate with each other in different ways, and are likely to be more open and responsive to certain types of communication. Social networking, electronic and mobile communications such as email and text are more prevalent among younger people. Where appropriate these platforms may be effective means of communicating safety messages.



### Key principles in safety critical communications:

- Identify who needs to communicate, and what their communication needs are
- Companies should consider the medium (e.g. face-to-face, procedure, radio) and method (e.g. written, verbal)
- Consider timings of key communications e.g. draw attention to hazards before people are required to carry out tasks
- Language should be appropriate to the workforce (consider literacy, first language) and use appropriate terminology
- If it is really important to get a message across, consider using two or more methods/media of communication e.g. written back up to a verbal communication.

<sup>1</sup> HSE Statistics 2011/12.